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THE SCHOOL REVIEW

A JOURNAL OF SECONDARY EDUCATION

THE HISTORY OF EARLY EDUCATION

IV. THE ARYAN RACES—PERSIANS AND MEDO-PERSIANS.*

In dealing with ancient Persia, we have to include as part of the same nationality—Media to the northwest and perhaps also Bactria to the northeast of Persia proper or Iran, which after a period of independence formed part of the Persian empire. As the word Iran denotes, the race was Aryan; and indeed it is this fact which gives Persia special interest to us.†

Speaking without minute regard to geographical limits, this branch of the Aryan race occupied the country lying between the Caspian sea on the north and the Persian gulf on the south, and they were bounded on the east and southeast by modern Afghanistan and Beloochistan, while on the west the mountain range of Zagros separated them from the Mesopotamian valley, within which the Babylonian and Assyrian empires had their seats. The country is a table-land intersected with beautiful and rich valleys. Where it descends to the sea on the south it is desert; on the north, where it descends towards the Caspian it is moist and warm and abounding in vegetation. Rich and various as are the products of much of Persia, a great part of it is barren. Its rivers are rapid and many of them pour down a great volume of water, but scarcely one can be said to be navigable. Physically, then, we find here

* Authorities:—Anab. and Cyro. of Xenophon; Herodotus; Plato; Strabo; Sir H. Rawlinson's Appendices and discussions in his translation of Herodotus; Ranke's History; Prof. Rawlinson's History (Ancient). Schmidt; Hegel. Düncker's History of Antiquity, with references to other sources.

† Media was the leading power up to 558 B. C. when it was conquered by Persia of which it long remained the most important province.

a home for a nation in which there are necessarily—owing to the existence of a high table-land and numerous deep valleys and the decline towards the sea on the north and south—much variety of climate, production, and scenery, and at the same time not of so large an area as to exclude any portion of the inhabitants from the various influences of the whole.

If the physical characteristics of a home can influence the character of a people, we may safely say that irregularity of surface and climatic variation will have a potent effect. In a country, too, much of which called on man for a struggle with nature—a struggle, however, by no means hopeless—the seeds of an originally vigorous and vivacious character would be nurtured. Nature was not so large and oppressive as in India where man, in a moist, torrid, and abundant country, was overpowered by the mass and prodigality of natural forms. Although the external circumstances of a nation are powerless to *make* it, they must largely modify its natural racial predisposition, while they certainly determine the character of its industrial activities and much of its political history.

But it is the *breed* of men which occupies any portion of the earth's surface that determines the historical drama which is to be there enacted far more, probably, than any other fact. The Persians belonged to our own race, that is to say, they were Aryans, and gave this name to what are otherwise called the "Indo-European" races. On the northwest the Medes and on the northeast their fellow-Aryans of Bactria constituted, with the Persai of the table-land and the rich valleys, the Persian people ethnologically: these three must be regarded as racially one.

The Persai spoke an Aryan tongue—called Zend, philologically connected with the tongues of Europe. The sacred writings were in this tongue and are known as the Zend-Avesta. When the Persian empire, as distinct from the country of Persia, rose into power, on the ruins of the Assyrian empire in the sixth century B. C., the pure original language was already greatly modified. A further stage of degeneration dated from the Conquest of Alexander the Great in 335 B. C. onwards; and now we have modern Persian so powerfully influenced by the Mohammedan Conquest in 651 A. D., as to consist largely—to the extent, I believe, of nearly one-half—of Arabic vocables. We have to do only with ancient Persia.

Political Constitution.—Of Cyrus the Great, who died, after a long and successful reign, in 529 B. C., there are no accurate detailed records. But we know that he extended his dominion so as not only to include Bactria and Media, but the ancient seats of the Babylonian and Assyrian empires, and carried his conquests to the furthest west of Asia Minor, and to the Scythians of the Oxus and Jaxartes in the northeast, among whom he met his death. The empire sustained itself until its subjugation by Alexander in 335 B. C.—vigorous but short-lived. It was a despotism governed by means of satraps; but local autonomy was everywhere conceded—the satraps merely *representing* the “great king,” and having a military colleague and a council with an army. Unity of government was an almost unmixed blessing in those times, as it was only under one supreme sovereign that nations could live in peace and civilization advance. So regarded, the Medo-Persian empire was a boon to the nations from the Mediterranean to Afghanistan and from the Oxus to the Persian gulf, and an important element in the general history of the world.

One of the most suggestive indications of the Persian natural disposition was to be found in that characteristic of their imperial administration to which I have adverted above—the recognition of local autonomy. They did not impose themselves unduly on subject nations and substituted a fixed tribute for arbitrary exactions. They had also, even within Persia-proper, great toleration of foreign customs and of other religious systems than their own. This characteristic of the Persian imperial sway is worthy of notice as contributing to a true estimate of the character of the governing race.

Among themselves there were seven tribal princes under the king and next to them seven supreme judges and a large staff of officials. The government was essentially bureaucratic, but subject always to the despotic authority of the sovereign.

Social and Civil Relations.—Passing from the political to the social system, note first that here in Persia the system of caste, if we except a hereditary priesthood, has no place. All may move freely; and, subject to the absolute authority of the “great king” lead their own lives. The policy of the kings was to gather the great nobles round a Court and to reward lavishly all who did service

to the State. Every one, even the meanest, was kept conscious of the national unity and felt himself to have a share in the government. The community of feeling was strong, and in their prayers when offering sacrifices the Persian was required to ask blessings on the Persian people generally and only on himself as included in the nation. The Persians were virtually a free people though under a despotic form of government.

The disposition of the Persian was towards equity, mercifulness of administration, and mildness of character. "The king," says Herodotus, "shall not put anyone to death for a single fault; and none of the Persians shall visit a single fault in a slave with any extreme penalty; but in every case the services of the offender shall be set against his misdoings; and if the latter be found to outweigh the former, the aggrieved party shall then proceed to punishment." They were also a kindly and domestic people. Children had to yield absolute obedience to their parents, just as citizens had to their rulers, it is true; but so convinced were they of the sacredness of the family tie (as founded in love and reverence) that they maintained "that never yet did anyone kill his father or his mother; but in all such cases they are quite sure that, if matters were sifted to the bottom, it would be found that the child was either a changeling or else the fruit of adultery: for it is not likely, they say, that the real father should perish by the hands of the child." (Herod.) We see here a strong family feeling.

Taking a general survey of the ancient Persian character (including, as we here may, under that designation the Medes and Bactrians) we cannot but be impressed with a certain freshness and nobility of mind among them. A high spirit and a pleasant temper are conspicuous, and in these respects they form a marked contrast to the Egyptian, Semitic and Chinese races, and even to their cognates the Hindus. We seem suddenly, at a point not more than a few hundred miles west from the basin the Indus and east of the Euphrates, and as we reach the bracing table-land, to encounter a new phase of humanity altogether—surpassingly interesting to us because we recognize in it a European type. The air we breathe is no longer stagnant as in China, no longer heavy with moisture and warmth as in India, nor so dry, stimulating and exciting as among the Semitic races, but breezy and healthful. We feel half way to Greece; for along with their

greater freshness of mind, nobility of nature and equity of disposition, we find in the Persian a friendliness and grace of courtesy which charm us, and of which Herodotus thus speaks:

“When they meet each other in the streets, you may know if the persons meeting are of equal rank by the following token: if they are of equal rank, then, instead of speaking, they kiss each other on the lips. In the case where one is inferior to the other, the kiss is given on the cheek; where the difference of rank is great, the inferior prostrates himself on the ground.”

“Of the family of mankind,” says a historian,* “which claimed, not unjustly, the distinctive name of ‘noble,’ (Arya) the Persians formed one of the finest types. When we first meet with them in history, they are a race of hardy mountaineers, brave in war, rude in manners, simple in their habits, abstaining from wine, and despising all the luxuries of food and dress. Though uncultivated in art and science, they, at a more advanced period of their national life, were distinguished for an intellectual ability, a lively wit, a generous, passionate and poetical temperament—qualities, however, which easily degenerated into vanity and want of perseverance. Their military spirit was kept in full vigour by their hardy mountain life, their simple and temperate habits, and the strict discipline in which they were trained from their youth up.”

That such a nation should be characterized by vanity, or rather a cheerful, inoffensive self-complacency, is not surprising. “Of nations,” says Herodotus, “they honour most their nearest neighbours whom they esteem next to themselves; those who live beyond these, they honour in the second degree, and so with the remainder. The reason is that they look on themselves as very greatly superior in all respects to the rest of mankind, regarding others as approaching to excellence in proportion as they dwell nearer to them; whence it comes to pass that those who are the farthest off must be the most degraded of mankind.” But with all this pardonable vanity they possessed generous and singularly open minds. This is manifest from what Herodotus elsewhere says: “There is no nation which so readily adopts foreign customs. Thus, they have taken the dress of the Medes, considering it superior to their own, and

* Philip Smith in his *History of the Ancient World*.

in war they wear the Egyptian breastplate. As soon as they hear of any luxury they immediately make it their own."

Let me sum up in the words of Plato, who, in his *De Legibus*, Book III, speaks as follows:

"In the reign of Cyrus, the Persians were freemen and also lords of many others: the rulers gave a share of freedom to the subjects, and being treated as equals, the soldiers were on better terms with their generals, and showed themselves more ready in the hour of danger. And if there was any wise counsellor among them, he imparted his wisdom to the public, for the king was not jealous, but allowed him full liberty of speech, and gave honour to those who were able to be his counsellors in anything, and allowed all men equally to participate in wisdom. And the nation waxed in all respects because there was freedom, and friendship, and communion of soul among them." (Jowett's Trans.)

Religion.—The fundamental idea of the Zoroastrian religion, which was the national religion of Persia, was that a pure one Spirit was creator and governor of all—in this respect exhibiting a close resemblance with the higher form of Judaism. The fire-priests of the elemental worship which had preceded the purer religion worshipped a plurality of good spirits called "Ahuros;" Zoroaster preached that Ahuro, which is Mazdaö, or creator of all things; hence the name for this supreme being was Auramazda afterwards Ormazd orOrmuzd. This supreme spirit is the creator of both the "earthly and spiritual life, the Lord of the whole universe at whose hands are all creatures."

Zoroaster also taught the doctrine of immortality.

"The Persian religion," says Hegel,* "is the religion of light. The source of light is not identified with nature as one with it, but is rather regarded as that which creates and vitalizes. In its human mental relations this light is wisdom, goodness, virtue, purity, truth—in its physical relations, it is that which vitalizes and makes beautiful—physical light—the light of the sun, which is still worshipped by the Parsees—the modern representatives of the Zend religion—as the symbol of intellectual, and the source of physical, light." Ormuzd, the lord of life and

* In his *Philosophy of History*.

light himself emerges as pure spirit from the "unlimited all," and with him there is also Ahriman, the spirit of darkness, decay and death, spirit of evil, source of all wrong. They appear primarily as twins; but Ahriman is not the equal of Ormuzd—only for a time does he maintain a seemingly equal warfare, to be finally subdued. Men as individuals are engaged in the warfare, and have to fight for light against darkness, good against evil, truth against falsehood, purity against impurity; but not hopelessly. God was on their side. We see in this religion an expression of the Persian character which would re-act on the individual life powerfully.

It is easy to see how even a religion as pure as this in conception should yet degenerate into a worship of the elements, or rather retain an ancient element worship as a parallel and popular system. Its priests were called Magi—a powerful hereditary class—representing, as priests in those ancient nationalities necessarily did, the philosophy, science, and wisdom of their nation, and embodying in their own caste many legislative functions. Among them, as interpreters of the ancient writings, there seem to have been schools of thought—some inclining to the concrete and elemental, as opposed to the pure and ancient spirit-doctrine. But even among the former was an abhorrence of all that savoured of idolatry. Even Herodotus, who saw and understood only the Magian and popular side of the Persian religion, says: "The customs which I know the Persians to observe are the following: They have no image of the gods, no temples, nor altars, and consider the use of them a sign of folly. This comes, I think, from their not believing the gods to have the same nature with men, as the Greeks imagine. Their wont, however, is to ascend the summits of the loftiest mountains, and there offer sacrifice to Jupiter, which is the name they give to the whole circuit of the firmament. To these gods the Persians offer sacrifice in the following manner: They raise no altar, light no fire, pour no libations; there is no sound of the flute, no putting on of chaplets, no consecrated barley-cake; but the man who wishes to sacrifice brings his victim to a spot of ground which is pure from pollution and there calls upon the name of the god to whom he intends to offer. It is usual to have the turban encircled with a wreath, most com-

monly of myrtle. The sacrificer is not allowed to pray for blessings on himself alone, but he prays for the welfare of the king and of the whole Persian people among whom he is of necessity included. He cuts the victim in pieces, and having boiled the flesh, he lays it out upon the tenderest herbage he can find, trefoil especially. When all is ready one of the Magi comes forward and chants a hymn, which, they say, recounts the origin of the gods. It is not lawful to offer sacrifice unless there is a Magus present. After waiting a short time, the sacrificer carries the flesh of the victim away with him, and makes whatever use of it he pleases." *

What chiefly concerns us, as students of the education of a people, is to bring into view the religious idea as the ultimate expression of the national life. That a religious system, such as I have briefly described, would give a distinct value to the individual personality is evident, and this, though it might be but imperfectly apprehended by the masses. Absorption or annihilation of his personality in Brahm is the last idea of perfected bliss which would have occurred to a genuine Persian! Nor would the idea of moral and divine law and a rigid contract to be fulfilled oppress him as it did the Jew. On the contrary, the Persian seems to have been a happy mortal: his birthdays were days of festivity. His life was to be a struggle to extend the kingdom of Light, but withal, a cheerful and a hopeful struggle.

The greatest of virtues were—as we might expect where the personality is strongly developed—truth-speaking and courage. Not only were they required to practise the virtues, but they were enjoined to guard their tongues. In the words of Herodotus: "They hold it unlawful to talk of anything that it is unlawful to do. The most disgraceful thing in the world, they think, is to tell a lie; the next worst to owe a debt,

* At what date Zoroastrianism reached its highest form is uncertain. The gradually growing writings and traditions were formulated probably about five centuries B. C. A recent French translator of the fragments of the Zend-Avesta would give a more modern date. On the other hand, inscriptions have come to light only two or three months ago which bear the name of Ormuzd and Ahriman and must have been cut out on stone about 480 B. C. Herodotus is probably wrong in talking of "gods." The Medes at the time of their conquest by Cyrus had a mongrel religion.

because, among other reasons, the debtor is obliged to tell lies." Personal purity and the preservation of the purity of water were also incumbent on them. "They never defile a river, nor even wash their hands in one; nor will they allow others to do so, as they have a great reverence for rivers."

We know so little of the educational methods of the Persians that it would be unjustifiable in me to dwell so long on their national characteristics were it not that in the education of the human race generally, they are to be regarded as a potent factor.

EDUCATION.

There was no educational *system* in Persia; but we can easily conceive the national and ethical result at which such education as they had aimed. This, it is easy to infer, from the sketch I have given of the manners, life and morals of the people. Perhaps the following view of Persian education may be accepted as substantially correct: *

The education of a Persian was considered to begin at his fifth (some say his seventh) year and continue till his twenty-fourth. To the seventh year the child was left entirely in the hands of the women of the household. Up to the fifth year, Herodotus tells us, "They are not allowed to come into the sight of their father, but pass their lives with the women. This is done that if the child die young, the father may not be afflicted with the loss." Of good and bad he was not supposed to be capable of knowing anything. Obedience was his sole duty. It was considered wrong to beat a child before his seventh year.

From the fifth year, Herodotus says, the public instruction of the boys began; it does not appear that the women had any save domestic training. Nor is it to be supposed that any class save what would correspond to our upper or wealthier classes had any education save that which national customs, institutions and religious rites might give to all citizens. We are not to accept all that Xenophon tells us in his romance called *Cyropædia*—even where he seems to be explicitly stating

* Some write with amazing fluency and confidence on the ancient Persian education, having apparently in their eye Xenophon's *Cyropædia* forgetting that it is a romance, to be accepted perhaps in its spirit, but certainly not in its letter.

facts. This, however, from Strabo and the general evidence of antiquity we know that the boys of the higher classes were brought up together under men of gravity and reputation at the Court of the king and also at the lesser court of the great nobles. In these central and departmental schools they were trained in shooting with the bow, riding and the use of the javelin, and other exercises; and in the course of this instruction great attention was paid to their education in truthfulness, justice and self-control. Noble deeds were recounted to them. They were rendered hardy by the severity of their exercise. The teachers and superintendents of the boys, it is said, were men above fifty years of age, who, by their example might be a pattern to the youth. We have in such schools, it will be seen, an anticipation of the mediæval schools of chivalry. Plato, in his *Alcibiades* speaks of the instruction of the sons of the kings in the wisdom of Zoroaster as well as in justice, temperance and courage. In the first book of the *Anabasis* Xenophon says of Cyrus the Younger, that "when he was receiving his education with his brother and the other youths, he was considered to surpass them all in everything." "All the sons of the Persian nobles" he adds, "are educated at the Royal palace, where they have an opportunity of learning many a lesson of virtuous conduct, but can see or hear nothing disgraceful. Here the boys see some honoured by the king and others degraded—so that in their very childhood they learn to govern and to obey. Here Cyrus, first of all, showed himself most remarkable for modesty among those of his own age, and for paying more ready obedience to his elders, than even those who were inferior to him in station; and next he was noted for his fondness for horses and for managing them in a superior manner. They found him, too, very desirous of learning and most assiduous in practising the war-like exercises of archery and hurling the javelin. When it suited his age, he grew exceedingly fond of the chase and of braving dangers in encounters with wild beasts."

Prayers and the holy doctrines of the priests were learned (doubtless from oral teaching) and somewhere about fifteen years of age the boys were invested with the holy girdle (made out of seventy-two threads of camel hair or wool and never laid aside day or night, as a protection against the Devas or evil spirits)

with many ceremonies. On this occasion the young Persian, after reciting his Confession of Faith, took upon himself a vow to follow the law of Zoroaster. It was at the fifteenth year that the boy was held to enter youth, that the family bands were relaxed, and that he became a servant of the State. In his twenty-fifth year the youth was looked upon as a man and citizen, and was subject to all duties in peace and war, till his fiftieth.

The object of the publicity of the education doubtless was, by bringing everything into the broad light of day, to withdraw youth from all those influences which could be hurtful to morality and decency of conduct and for which privacy and separation from their elders give opportunity. Roger Ascham, for the same reason, advocates public games as against private amusements.

The Semitic races were religious and devout. Their religions were their political and social bonds. But they all were characterized by a subjection of the spirit of man to the divine power—a power, too, not always of very humane attributes. As superstitious they were slaves to the unseen. It was otherwise with the Persian. Morality and virility were the governing ideas. Personality and the responsibility of each individual for the diffusion of good were national characteristics. Their religion taught them reverence—a reverence extended to the great king who was governor under Auramazda; but this reverence was not slavishness. The individual had to fight with and for Auramazda and the kingdom of Light. Truthfulness, justice, and courage were accordingly, the cardinal virtues and by these characteristics the Persians were, if we may believe history and tradition, generally distinguished; in these they educated their children. Education in our modern sense did not exist either as instruction or discipline outside the ethical elements.

This is all that can be said, with even an approximation to accuracy, about the educational machinery of the Persians. It was manifestly only the well-to-do, who participated in the national training—probably only the leading tribe of the Pasargadæ. All others would be dependent on domestic life and tradition. The Persians were not a literary people and school education in the Hellenic sense was impossible.

The significance of Persian life and education lies in the combination of a free personality with nationality. The existence

of the former was found to strengthen and not to weaken the common bond. In this personality we have the beginning of an ideal aim of personal life. *Individual* courage, truthfulness and purity were constituents of the ideal. Man becomes under the Persian conception a personal factor in the world-order. Caste and its depressing and restrictive influences do not exist. The Persian is thus the true starting point of the specifically Aryan world-development, and the transition from the Semitic-oriental to the Hellenic type of life. With a sense of personality there comes into existence freedom and many consequent virtues. The Persian seems to bridge the gulf between the Oriental and the European.

If we compare the Jew and the Persian we find ourselves in the presence of opposing ideas. On the one hand, slavery to a technical legalism; on the other, personal freedom and responsibility. With the highly educated among the Persians we have an idea of God and his relation to the life of man much purer, truer and more profound than among the Jews. On the other hand we have in the educated Jew a far more intense conception of the moral element in God. He is a God of moral law and as such in personal relation to each man. With the Persian the actual personality of God is lost, and the moral relation of God to the world and man is more generalized, less definite and less individual. In the Persian there was a possibility of progress and it is difficult to understand why he did not advance. In the Jew, no progress was possible except by revolution, and Christ effected that. The Christian conception of God is a mixture of the Zoroastrian and Judaic.

APPENDED NOTE.

It is not our business to trace the brief history of the Persian Empire. When one considers, however, the high military and healthy ethical characteristics of the Persian when he was an all-conquering force, it is permitted to us to wonder at his rapid degradation and fall. With so excellent an ethical and religious basis of national life, how came it that the Court in less than 100 years from the death of Cyrus had developed all the vices which are popularly associated with Oriental despotisms? The imperial organization was too lax to be permanent, but the degradation of the Persian character wants explanation. May we not suggest that had there been an organized education on the basis of Zoroastrianism of a considerable section of the people, the Empire reduced to manageable limits might have held its own even against Alexander, who gave it its final blow?

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